DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 401 248 SP 036 981

AUTHOR Hillkirk, Keith; And Others
TITLE School-University Partnerships in a Rural Context.
PUB DATE 96
NOTE 22p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College School Cooperation; Distance Education; Elementary Education; Elementary School Teachers; *Field Experience Programs; Higher Education; *Partnerships in Education; Preservice Teacher Education; Professional Development; *Program Development; Public Schools; *Rural Schools; Student Teachers; *Teacher Education Programs; Teacher Educators; Teaching Experience
IDENTIFIERS *Ohio University

ABSTRACT

The College of Education of Ohio University has developed a number of partnerships with public schools in southeastern Ohio. The partnerships described share at least six common threads: (1) a beginning in informal conversation; (2) a shared set of goals; (3) an early focus on preservice teacher preparation; (4) a gradual expansion towards collaboration on professional development, proposal writing, and other common endeavors; (5) openness to creative and flexible rewards and incentives; and (6) minimal up-front investment. The efforts include: the Teacher Education for Civic Responsibility (TECR) Program, now called the Creating Active and Reflective Educators (CARE) Program; a program that includes professional development for classroom teachers; proposal development; the Appalachian Distance Learning Project, a fiber optic network that links three third-grade classrooms with the College of Education; and teaching of college course work by classroom teachers and district administrators. This effort also includes year-long professional development workshops and preservice field experience. The partnership experiences have shown that: little initial financial support is required; beginning informally and small is best; and recognizing the diversity between university and public school cultures is necessary. Existing partnerships are being strengthened to enhance partnerships that center around student teaching and teacher induction, and teacher research is being supported in problems arising directly from teaching practice. (JLS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 401 248

School-University Partnerships in a Rural Context

Keith Hillkirk

Wells Singleton

Jean Ann Hunt

Betty Mason

Vicky Mingus

Carolyn Richardson

Keith Hillkirk is Assistant Dean, and Wells Singleton, Dean, of the Ohio University College of Education. Jean Ann Hunt, Betty Mason, Vicky Mingus, and Carolyn Richardson teach in the College of Education and in partnership schools.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S Hillkirk

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

SP036981

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

School-University Partnerships in a Rural Context

Situated in rural, Appalachian Ohio, Ohio University is located in Athens, a quiet, university town with about 25,000 full-time residents. When the 19,000 university students leave town for periodic breaks, their absence is perhaps most notable through the availability of parking space. The university serves a heavily-wooded region that has been hard hit by the decline in steel production and the related drop in demand for coal. For over a century, the university has prepared teachers for the region's schools. Today, the College of Education enrolls approximately 1500 preservice teachers and 500 graduate students in both master's and doctoral programs.

Over the past six years, the College has developed a number of partnerships with public schools in southeastern Ohio. While all the partnerships share a number of common themes and qualities, each relationship also reflects a number of unique characteristics. In this article we begin by describing the qualities that the partnerships share in common, then trace the origins and evolution of each of the partnerships. We conclude by sharing lessons we have learned about building and nurturing partnerships, along with suggestions for partnership development.

Commonalities

The partnerships described below share at least six common threads: a beginning in informal conversation; a shared set of goals; an early focus on preservice teacher preparation; a gradual expansion towards collaboration on professional development, proposal writing, and other common endeavors; openness to creative and flexible rewards and incentives; and minimal up-front investment.

Reflecting on our work with school colleagues, we recognize that each of the partnerships began informally as a conversation between a small number of colleagues. In some cases the conversation was initiated by university faculty; in others, especially more recently, a school principal or teacher initiated dialogue to which the college responded. In all instances the initial conversation group gradually expanded to include a larger number of faculty from both school and college. Also, in all cases, these conversations developed around efforts to identify ways that we could support and enrich one another's work.

Working with public school colleagues, we have identified five major goals that are shared by all of our partnerships:

1. To improve Pre K-16 education for all students;
2. To provide increased field experience opportunities for

preservice teachers in public school classrooms;

3. To create mentoring relationships for preservice teachers to learn with, and from, experienced inservice teachers;
4. To support and encourage ongoing professional development for faculty and administrators in partnership schools and the college;
5. To study and learn about effective ways of developing and strengthening partnership relationships.

These goals became clear only after we were embedded in the shared work of creating partnerships with public school colleagues. Yet, as we look back over the past six years, we can see that each goal has played an important role in focusing our energies as each partnership has evolved.

Another common feature of each of the partnerships has been an early focus on preservice teacher preparation. And as will be explained below, as we have collaborated with public school colleagues in expanding and improving the quality of teacher preparation, we have gradually realized that additional opportunities for ongoing professional development of both school and college faculty, proposal development, and inquiry were emerging.

In retrospect, we also recognize that all of the partnership efforts

have benefited immensely from participants' willingness to be both flexible and creative in identifying rewards and incentives for involvement. While a particular grant may have provided support for a specific component of a partnership, all but one of the partnerships were created and have been sustained with minimal financial investment. As will be described, each partnership's players continue to pool their talents and creative energies toward student benefit.

The Beginning

Our partnership efforts began modestly in 1989 with an alternative undergraduate program that placed preservice teachers in public school classrooms for extended field experiences (1). From an initial cohort group of 12 students, the Teacher Education for Civic Responsibility (TECR) Program has experienced a name change to the Creating Active and Reflective Educators (CARE) Program and has gradually expanded to this year's cohort of 30 students. Originally focused on preparing novice teachers who are committed to creating democratic classrooms that emphasize active, hands-on learning, the partnership with the Federal Hocking Local School District continues this emphasis but has also expanded to include professional development for classroom teachers, proposal development, teaching of college course work by classroom

teachers and district administrators, and other efforts at collaboration that share one common theme--the sharing of human and financial resources for mutual benefit.

Within the preservice component, undergraduates are given numerous opportunities to practice creating democratic classrooms that engage students in active, cooperative learning. To help preservice teachers bridge the gap between theory and practice, 80% of the courses in the CARE Program are field based with heavy emphasis on reflection on practice. Students log approximately 1000 hours in Federal Hocking classrooms by the time they graduate. The extensive field work allows for close relationships to develop between undergraduates and public school students, as well as with their mentor teachers.

During the past year, inservice teachers have initiated two year-long professional development workshops. Teachers who created multi-aged primary classrooms two years ago are working with a university faculty member to implement and evaluate a new math program for their students. At the same time intermediate teachers have begun a study group that focuses on "Teaching Kids to Care: Motivation and Citizenship Issues for 9-12 Year Olds." Participants make use of tuition waivers to earn credit for their study as well.

Currently, partnership faculty are focusing their energies on three additional projects: experimenting with a model of student teacher supervision that involves public school teachers working in mentoring teams with student teachers; expanding public school teachers' role in teaching other college course work, particularly teaching methods courses that are increasingly being offered in partnership schools; and the addition of a community-service component to the undergraduate program.

Formative evaluation of the partnership has been ongoing throughout the past five years. Feedback from undergraduates indicates that they particularly value three aspects of the CARE Program: being part of a cohort group which over the course of three years enables them to get to know and rely upon one another in ways that are not possible in a traditional preparation program; their perception that there is a high level of consistency between the program's emphasis on hands-on learning and the teaching that they see and experience in the schools and college; and the emphasis on field work and mentoring by experienced classroom teachers. As one of the students commented,

> The program, which has proved to me that democratic teaching nurtures creative minds more so than traditional methods, is constructed around a 'close-knit' group of students who deal with

> each other in close, personal ways--this has important benefits which I believe are important when dealing with a class. We teach how we were taught (1: 55-56).

Feedback from public school teachers has also been quite supportive. Two years ago 33 teachers who have mentored CARE students were individually interviewed to learn their perceptions of the program. Teachers generally indicated agreement with the program's emphasis on field work and active, hands-on learning. In response to the question, "For what reasons would you like to have a CARE graduate as a professional colleague?", one teacher responded

> I'd take the CARE student in a minute, okay, because they've got more hands-on experience with the kids. They've seen more different teaching styles from the different teachers they've worked with (2: 8).

Another teacher's response pointed to the increasing emphasis on teacher collaboration highlighted in the current literature: "I think in CARE they've been working collaboratively, and I think the future of education is teachers collaborating" (2: 8).

Of the few negative comments shared by teachers, one was critical but at the same time highlighted the need for expanding partnership

availability. This teacher criticized the CARE Program for being elitist in admitting a limited number of students and added that "it's a shame, a crying shame, that all OU students aren't given this sort of education" (2: 9).

The Plains Elementary School Project

The Plains Elementary School Partnership began in 1991 with the vision that junior year, elementary methods courses could be most effectively taught on site in an elementary school. In-depth planning and discussions between the two faculties led to a pilot project during Spring 1992. Though the project curriculum has continued to grow and evolve, it has basically followed the original format.

Each academic year a cohort group of 25 junior level university students spends three quarters with a team of professors and teacher-mentors learning content and pedagogy as they concurrently complete more than 400 clock hours in both primary and intermediate classrooms. Through a steering committee that meets monthly, the elementary and university faculties collaborate in the planning, development, and delivery of an integrated curriculum that focuses on providing a self-renewing, reflective, and cooperative learning environment.

The ongoing evolution of the partnership has taken several avenues.

A large percentage of the university students return to the school for their student teaching experience to work with cooperating teachers with whom they have already developed strong working relationships. Returning student teachers, along with other student teachers who are new to the building, are supervised by the partnership liaison-teacher. The liaison-teacher is a practicing classroom teacher who teaches in the elementary school half time and spends the remainder of time supervising student teachers and supporting other partnership activities. Student teaching seminars are conducted on site by the liaison with the assistance of other teachers. The liaison also provides mentoring for the graduate student intern who shares the liaison's classroom.

Professional development opportunities continue to multiply. Elementary and university faculty members plan and participate in professional development together. For the past two years, several teachers have utilized tuition scholarships to participate in action research projects supervised by a partnership university professor. College faculty also join their elementary colleagues in staff development workshops on topics including cooperative learning. Teachers are hired as part-time instructors each quarter and regularly attend and present at conferences with university faculty.

Assessment of partnership efforts has been ongoing as well. Results of one study (3) indicate that students who particpated in the partnership viewed opportunities to work with individual elementary students and small groups of learners and to learn first hand how to use cooperative learning effectively as particularly valuable in their preparation. University students compare their experience to an "extended internship." Students who return their final year for student teaching are self assured as a result of their extended field experience opportunities during the previous year (4). One student teacher reported, "Where many student teachers have a difficult time with discipline, I am confident in the classroom and am prepared to make it a constructive learning environment" (4: 5). Another student related,

> This partnership is the best preparation for student teaching, and I would not have half of the confidence in my teaching ability as I do, nor be nearly as comfortable relating to the teachers and students as I am, if it weren't for the Plains Project. It is through this year-long program that I received the perfect middle step before student teaching. I was given responsibilities and authority, yet it was not to the extent of that which I have been given during student teaching. (4: 5)

Chauncey Elementary School

Like The Plains Elementary School, Chauncey Elementary is part of the Athens City School District. Again, similar to The Plains, Chauncey Elementary serves a small, rural community that joined the city district through consolidation. Partnership between Chauncey Elementary and the College grew out of a desire for Chauncey students to have opportunities for interactions with people of different cultures.

Two years ago, over a period of several months, Chauncey and College faculty discussed ways of providing enrichment for Chauncey students. These conversations led to a small grant which supported the creation of "Chauncey Goes to College Day" when all first through sixth graders were bused to the university to spend a day visiting classes, residence halls, and exploring the campus. Although only five miles separates the two communities, for many students this was their first opportunity to see the university and meet students from many different cultures. This initial experience has since led to several visits by international students to the school to share aspects of their language and culture and to the third annual "Chauncey Goes to College Day" which is currently being planned.

Building on the success of the campus visit, continuing

conversations led to identifying ways of bringing more college students to the school to work and learn with Chauncey teachers and students. At the present time, 50 elementary education students are nearing completion of a full-year's placement at the school. University students spend two days a week at the school working with language arts in pre-school through sixth grade. Once a week they also meet in a seminar setting on campus to process their classroom experiences and link study of theory of language arts instruction with their field work.

An addtional focus for the university students has been portfolio assessment. As they collect represenative samples of elementary students' learning and development, they are simutaneously learning how to prepare a personal portfolio of their own learning and accomplishments to share with prospective employers.

As in the other partnerships, teachers are provided the opportunity to earn graduate credit through on-site study groups and seminars. Teachers and university faculty have designed the seminars to meet teachers' needs and concerns. During the 1994-95 school year, multi-age grouping was studied and is now being piloted by grades one and two. Two study groups are currently starting, one focused on increasing parent involvement in the school and the other focused on identifying ways of

increasing student achievement.

From a small beginning that focused on student enrichment, the Chauncey Partnership has gradually expanded to enhance the learning of elementary students, preservice teachers, and both school and college faculty. Formative feedback from teachers and university students is positive. Teacher-mentors report that they value their expanded roles, as well as the increased time that preservice teachers spend in their classrooms. One teacher, for example, commented, "Don't ever take these partnership students away." In response, plans are being made to add more courses to the partnership which will mean increasing the hours preservice teachers spend in classrooms.

University students remain enthusiastic as well. As one student recently reflected in a course journal, "the Chauncey Project has been a great experience for me so far. I think that by being in my first/second grade classroom, I am really learning a lot about how children come to literacy."

Appalachian Distance Learning Project

While the above partnerships grew out of informal conversations between public school and university educators, the Appalachian Distance Learning Project (ADLP) began five years ago as a vision shared with

executives of two major telecommunications companies, GTE and Ameritech, who were interested in providing technology expertise and capability to schools. Further discussions that included the Ohio Department of Education and the Appalachian Regional Commission led to a creative plan which has deeply affected the teaching and learning process in three third grade classrooms. Similar to our other partnerships, the ADLP has developed expanded learning opportunities for preservice and inservice teachers as well.

After over a year of planning, a fiber optic network was established which links third grade classrooms in three elementary schools with the College of Education. Beyond fiber optics and hardware, however, ADLP emphasizes a view of classrooms in which third graders are actively engaged in learning centers through a science and math curriculum that is problem based. Each elementary classroom is "overstaffed" throughout the school year to include six adults--an experienced mentor teacher and five student teachers--working with small groups of young learners.

Partnership school and university faculty collaborated to create a constructivist curriculum that engages students interactively via the fiber optic network. Third graders plan and implement math and science experiments and engage with one another on live television. Student

teachers in all three classrooms wear headsets which permit them to communicate directly, individually or collectively, with a teacher education professor located in the College of Education. Instant coaching is available as cooperatively planned lessons are taught.

The ADLP has created a model for educators and telecommunications personnel interested in advancing reform of classroom teaching and learning. Ongoing evaluation of the project has indicated how positively participating teachers view their implementation of a constructivist, problem-based curriculum. At the same time, much has been learned about the challenges of communication within such a complex project.

Keeping everyone, including teachers, administrators, school board members, parents, and the larger community of stakeholders, informed about the benefits of such an endeavor is a major challenge. Newsletters, while helpful, have proven not to be necessarily the best way to communicate progress. Rather, participants have discovered there is nothing more effective than immersing stakeholders in the actual classrooms to observe students and teachers as they use advanced technology to facilitate learning.

Feedback and observations have demonstrated measurable improvements in student motivation and enthusiasm, parent commitment,

and school attendance. In addition, teacher participants remain committed to the use of technology as an effective means for delivering and engaging students in a constructivist, problem-based curriculum.

Lessons Learned and Suggestions for Partnership Development

Our experiences in the above partnerships have taught us several lessons and lead to the following observations and suggestions for schools and colleges that are interested in partnership development:

1. *Don't worry about a large financial investment; money is not key to beginning a partnership.* We have found that little, up-front investment was required in the development of the above partnerships, except for the distance learning project which depends upon fiber optic technology. At the same time, we have also learned that closer collaboration between school and college spawns creativity and can lead to success in attracting outside resources. For example, nearly all of the partnership schools described above have been successful in attracting outside grants which are now supporting aspects of ongoing partnership efforts.

We have also been struck repeatedly by the large amount of "sweat equity" that each of the partnerships represents. Members of partnership school and college faculties have invested thousands of hours in the creation and sustenance of these relationships that to now have touched

literally hundreds of public school students, as well as scores of preservice teachers and partnership school and college faculty.

2. *Start informally and small.* As mentioned above, all of the partnerships began in small, informal conversations that gradually expanded to include larger numbers of administrators and faculty from both school and college. Our experience tells us that it is best to avoid formal, written agreements that seek to prescribe specific roles and expectations. We believe instead that successful partnership depends upon building a level of trust and mutual respect that over time convinces both parties that no one will be exploited in this shared journey.

3. *Recognize that the cultures of public schools and universities differ and seek to enrich, rather than change, one another.* Speaking recently at the national Holmes Conference in Washington, D.C., Professor Harry Judge of Oxford University asked the following question: "What can we (school and university) do together that neither of us can do alone?"

Our experiences have convinced us there is much that we can do together. While wheels have spun at times, as people on either side of the divide that so often separates public schools and colleges have focused on our differences, we have found that we educators share a great deal in common--particularly during times of fiscal constraint and intense public

scrutiny.

We in the university have also come to appreciate the ways that teachers pull us back to the realities and challenges of practice. And as more and more partnership school teachers and administrators have elected to teach college coursework or enroll in graduate study, they have gained an appreciation for the values of reflection and deliberation that the daily grind of school practice inhibits. What we have mutually discovered to be truly exciting is the synergy that partnership efforts spark, as we work to improve learning opportunities for all of our students.

As Bracey has observed, "schools and universities must realize they need each other. The university reveres the reflection so much needed in schools; the university needs the schools to help define the agenda and the constructs" (5:66).

A Look to the Future

What lies ahead for school-university partnerships at Ohio University? We are currently focusing on three emphases: strengthening existing partnerships towards the five goals identified above; developing new, modified partnerships that center around student teaching and teacher induction; and supporting teacher research on questions and

problems that grow directly from teaching practice. We have just hosted a symposium for partnership schools and college faculty that was intended to educate and empower teachers in ways of doing inquiry that inform and guide practice. Experience tells us that partnership school and college expectations for collaboration are going to continue to increase. We expect to be busy.

References

1. Hillkirk, K., J. McMath, B. Reeves, M. Smith-Singleton, and W. Smith. "An Experiment in Teacher Preparation: Teacher Education for Civic Responsibility." *Teacher Education Quarterly* 21(3): 1994, 47-57.
2. Hillkirk, K., and S. J. Skinner-Morris. "Teacher Perceptions of the CARE Program: An Alternative Teacher Preparation Program that Emphasizes Democratic Teaching and Active Learning." Manuscript submitted for publication, 1996.
3. McCutcheon, J., and A. Leep. *Formative Evaluation of The Plains Project.* Unpublished manuscript, Ohio University College of Education, 1994.
4. Mingus, V. *The Plains/Ohio University Partnership: BEST Practices Application Narrative.* Unpublished manuscript, Ohio University College of Education, 1996.

5. Bracey, G. W. "Rethinking School and University Roles." *Educational Leadership* 47(8): 1990, 65-66.